

THE HON. MARCELLA A. HOLLAND '83

The Benjamin L. Cardin Pro Bono Service Award

Marcella A. Holland's reaction to being chosen as this year's recipient of the Benjamin L. Cardin Pro Bono Service Award typifies her easy, natural, albeit disciplined, work ethic. "I was so surprised. I thought the award went to those performing legal *pro bono* work," she exclaims (as if Holland's *pro bono* activities do not meet that criterion).

PATRICIA YOUNG

As associate judge for the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, Holland notes that she has to be selective in the outside interests she chooses to support. Yet her professional career and community involvement seamlessly mesh, born of her family's expectations.

Raised in Howard County (Md.), Holland's family was inspired by her country preacher father who instilled in everyone the idea of giving back. "I grew up with my father's words ringing in my head—'service is the rent we pay for space on Earth.' Also, growing up in the civil rights era, I felt that I had no choice but to get involved," explains Holland.

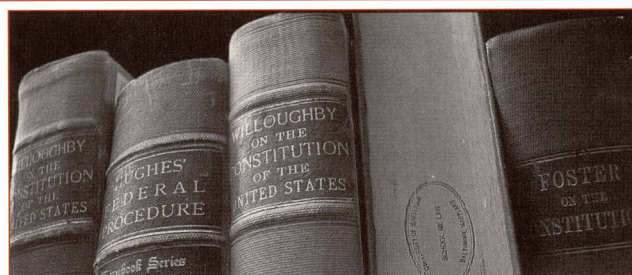
Her family's philosophy and values informed her decision to practice as a public service lawyer. After graduating from the School of Law in 1983, Holland spent nearly 13 years as an assistant state's attorney for Baltimore City, before being appointed to the bench in September 1997. Each step in her career was met, initially, with some resistance. "I learn the hard way," Holland laughs.

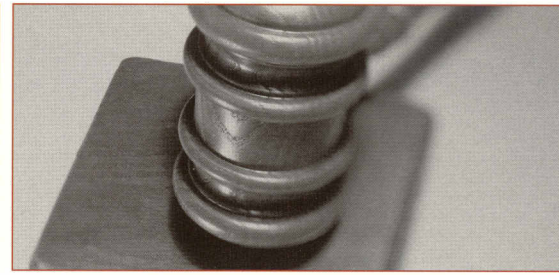
Her high school years earned her a place in the National Honor Society; her grades were exceptional. After high school, Holland was a legal secretary, Della

Street from "Perry Mason" her role model. "When I watched 'Perry Mason,' Della Street was it," Holland asserts.

After some years in Della's shoes, Holland switched gears and graduated from the University of Maryland Baltimore County and then went on to the School of Law. An avid mystery reader who particularly enjoys the intrigue of courtroom drama, Holland saw herself as a defense lawyer, but "[former Mayor] Kurt Schmoke wanted me to be a prosecutor. So I eventually gave in—and I loved it. I could serve the population better." Then Holland was "pushed to the bench;" she applied and was selected the first time. Her reaction was: "Wow! I seem to resist at first and then get there and see the potential."

Seeing potential is key in her *pro bono* work. Holland enjoys broad-based mentoring as well as the occasional one-on-one situation. As a judge, she has the opportunity to speak at area high schools for Law Days, enticing young people who have an interest in the legal profession. "I feel obligated to go to predominantly African-American schools," says Holland. Once these young folks show an interest in law, there are internship programs and minority clerkship programs with which Holland is involved through the Bar Association of Baltimore City.





"When I join a bar association, I tend to gravitate toward programs that will help young people in their careers as lawyers, and if they choose to, elevate to the bench," Holland asserts.

In March 2001, Holland was appointed judge in charge of the domestic docket. "I'm doing it [*pro bono* work] everyday in the family division," says Holland, who explains that with the exception of domestic violence, their docket has the highest volume of filings with only three judges. Because of the emotional impact, the

judges rotate out each year, and Holland is currently on the civil docket. Yet there are certain motions and dockets that only she can review, grant or deny. Plus, as judge in charge, she has to troubleshoot and generate and review policies, programs and budgets.

There is so much to do, yet she manages to continue to look beyond her immediate responsibilities. She and her staff have created a children's waiting room in the family division, complete with art projects from area elementary schools decorating the walls. The schools also work with Maryland Institute College of Art students to create murals that help establish a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere for children going through scary times in their lives.

In addition to her other responsibilities, she is vice chair of the advisory committee for Teen Court, a new alternative to juvenile court, where teens are tried by their peers. From bailiff to prosecuting attorney to jury member, teens try the offender in a court of his or her peers. "Punishment can consist of writing essays or letters of apology along with mandatory jury duty," Holland explains.

She participates in the Lake Clifton High School shadowing program, where students have the opportunity to live a day in the life of Judge Holland. "I also do informal shadowing programs during the summer and over Christmas break."

Holland truly lives by her father's rule and proclaims, "I have seen how helping others helps you." ■

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